ACCELERATED QUALITY EDUCATION FOR LIBERIAN CHILDREN

LIBERIA

RAPID EDUCATION AND RISK ANALYSIS (RERA)

JUNE 2017

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June 2017

USAID/LIBERIA ABE: ACCESS IDIQ CONTRACT

AID-OAA-I-14-00073/AID-669-TO-17-00001

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABE	Alternative Basic Education
ALP	Accelerated Learning Program
AQE	Accelerated Quality Education for Liberian Children
CEO	County Education Officer
CWD	Children with disabilities
DEO	District Education Officer
EDC	Education Development Center, Inc.
EMIS	Education Monitoring Information System
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
GBV	Gender-based violence
GNI	Gross National Income
GoL	Government of Liberia
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HDI	Human Development Index
JH	Junior High
KII	Key Informant Interview
MoE	Ministry of Education
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
RERA	Rapid Education and Risk Analysis
RTTI	Rural Teacher Training Institute
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene

Introduction

USAID Accelerated Quality Education for Liberian Children

Funded by USAID, Accelerated Quality Education for Liberian Children aims to increase access to education for approximately 48,000 out-of-school children ages 8 to 15 in targeted 6 counties of Liberia (Bong, Grand Bassa, Nimba, Lofa, Montserrado and Margibi). This project is designed in order to enable USAID/Liberia to do the following:

- Contribute to USAID/Liberia's Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) Development Objective 4, *Better-Educated Liberians*;

- Meet its targets under Goal 3 of the 2011 USAID Education Strategy, *increased equitable access to education in crisis and conflict environments,* achieving direct outcomes in education access for out-of-school children;

- Provide relevant, flexible and quality education opportunities for out-of-school children in Liberia giving them the opportunity to pursue onward education, training or employment;

- Provide technical assistance and build partnerships with key Ministry of Education (MoE) counterparts and host country systems; particularly to institutionalize a nation-wide legitimate and credible accelerated education program;

- Strengthen the policies, systems, and resources that are available to the MoE, particularly in the area of accelerated education;

- Foster positive gender norms, including a highlighted attention on girls and female teachers, who are the least likely to have access to education in Liberia;

- Promote stability during a key transition in post-war and post-Ebola Liberia through engagement of out-of-school children in activities that advance conflict resolution and key life skills.

The activity has two main result areas: first, that the ALP framework be institutionalized, and second, that eligibility of ALP learners to transition to formal education be increased. The development hypothesis of the project is that if the ALP regulatory framework is institutionalized, then the safety of the ALP centers will improve and teachers' instruction will improve leading to more ALP learners transitioning to the formal education system.

Under Result 1, Accelerated Quality Education for Liberian Children will support the MoE to adopt national ALP policies, including accreditation policies for centers, learner eligibility policy, certification policy, and a national curriculum. The activity will train CEOs on the usage of ALP EMIS monitoring data for decision making and on budgeting, support DEOs to visit centers and oversee their accreditation and certification, and train school principals in supervising their ALPs. Finally, the activity will strengthen community awareness of ALP policies and opportunities, train PTAs on the ALP framework, and create regular feedback loops between communities and the local education authorities.

Under Result 2, the activity will rehabilitate and furnish ALPs with the aim of readying them for use, improving their safety, and making them accessible for boys, girls, and children with disabilities. The activity will mobilize communities to identify out-of-school children for enrollment in ALPs, as well as create a code of conduct around school-related gender based violence to which communities will be sensitized. The activity will train teachers and in the ALP curriculum and summative assessment tools, and produce and distribute curriculum materials to schools.

Figure 1. AQE Results Framework
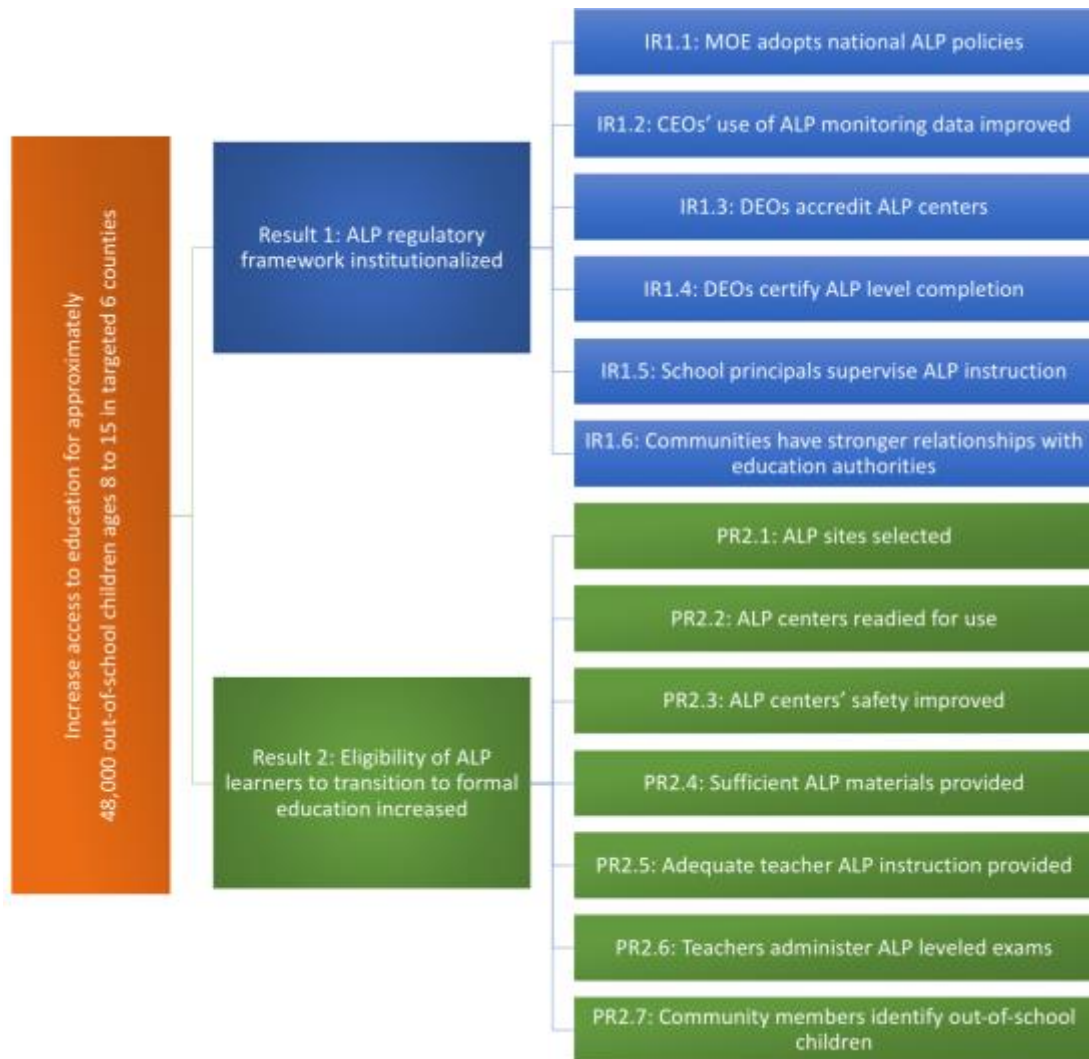
Accelerated Quality Education for Liberian Children has been implemented by Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) from its start in 2017.

The Rapid Education and Risk Analysis (RERA)

Developed by the USAID Education in Crisis and Conflict Network, the Rapid Education and Risk Analysis (RERA) tool is designed to capture information about how education systems, learners and their communities interact with a dynamic, multiple-risk environment, and how those risks in turn impact project activities and outcomes. EDC conducted this RERA in the project's first four months for the purpose of informing the program's design as it embarks on its four-year period of performance.

The purpose of this RERA is to:

▪ Highlight the main barriers that hinder access, retention, and success in school or accelerated learning programs (ALPs) for over-aged or out-of-school children in Liberia ages 8 to 15, to, as well as factors that contribute to resiliency;

- Make recommendations for specific interventions to address issues, mitigate risks, and/or increase resiliency within AQE project scope;

- Recommend indicators to track and how to measure aspects that may impede or promote overall success of intervention.

This RERA includes a desk review of available secondary data and, to gather information on questions not addressed in the secondary data, a primary data collection effort comprised of key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). In parallel to and conjunction with the RERA was the project Gender Assessment; the RERA and Gender Assessment shared data collection tools and efforts, but the data was analyzed separate and two different reports were produced.

Methodology

Topics and Research Questions

The overall research question was, ***what are the main barriers that hinder access, retention, and success in school or accelerated learning programs (ALPs) for over-aged or out-of-school children in Liberia ages 8 to 15, to, as well as factors that contribute to resiliency?***

In our secondary data analysis, we sought to identify, within the context of Liberia's recent history and societal circumstances, the barriers to school access, retention, and success, as well as sources of cohesion and resilience, across the following categories of factors: sociocultural, health, economic, school-related, gender, and political factors.

The information gaps in the available secondary data informed the research questions for our primary data collection. Broadly, primary data collection sought to address the following topics:

- **Access to and retention in education programs.** *What are the most common reasons why children ages 8-15 never enter schools or ALPs, drop out, or have intermittent access, or are over-aged? What factors might influence their decision to enroll and stay in school or an ALP?*
- **Relationship between ALPs and formal schools.** *What are the potential drivers of conflict or confusion and mitigating factors in communities where there is access to both primary schools and ALPs? When should ALP students join formal schools?*
- **Children with disabilities.** *What are the factors that prevent access to schooling for children with disabilities, and how can they be mitigated?*

Secondary Data Collection and Analysis

The desk review was conducted over the course of several weeks in preparation for the primary data collection. The team compiled reports and documents in an online, internal database for ease of access during the review process. Once this information had been carefully analyzed, the team synthesized the key findings to determine the risks and challenges in the Liberian education sector, including barriers to education access, retention and success, especially for out-of-school youth or those at-risk for dropping out. These included sociocultural, health, economic, school-related, gender, and political factors. The analysis included information about the country context, as well as the 2014-2015 Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak, regional conflict dynamics and issues related to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Once this phase of the desk review was finished, the team discussed the findings in-depth, looking for gaps in the existing literature that could be filled through the primary data collection, as well as identifying key questions to be asked during the focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

The desk review drew heavily from the 2016 Liberia Education Sector Analysis, which was conducted by the World Bank and the Liberia Ministry of Education. Additionally, the team reviewed reports from UNICEF, IBIS, and recent USAID-funded projects such as the Girls' Opportunities to Access Learning (GOAL) Plus and Advancing Youth Project. For a full list of reports and sources referenced in the desk review, see the bibliography.

Primary Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data collection targeted both rural and urban sites in two counties in Liberia, Montserrado and Grand Bassa, for the focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews.

Tools

We developed four data collection tools for primary data collection:

1. Teachers' focus group discussion (FGD) protocol
2. Parents' FGD protocol
3. Children's FGD protocol
4. Teachers for children with disabilities' interview protocol

The three FGD protocols focused on questions around **access and retention, the relationship between ALPs and formal schools,** and **gender-based violence** (the findings from the gender-based violence sections are reported in the Gender Assessment, rather than this RERA). The protocols were tailored to be appropriate for each participant group.

The KII protocol focused on issues of school access for **children with disabilities,** including teachers' and communities' perceptions of children with disabilities and the existing barriers and supports for these children to receive education.

The full text of each protocol can be found in the annexes.

Sample

Montserrado and Grand Bassa were chosen as two counties that, looking at both urban and rural sites, could sufficiently represent the other counties in which the project would operate. In addition, limiting data collection to two counties was necessary because of the high volume of data we expected receive and the limited time for analysis.

We conducted 12 FGDs per county: four parent FDGs, four teacher FDGs, and four child FDGs. Half of the FDGs were in rural areas, and half in urban areas. FGDs were single sex, with separate male and female FGDs for teachers, for parents, and for children, to mitigate the effects that gender and unequal power dynamics might have on women's reluctance to discuss sensitive subjects or to be talked over when sharing ideas. An outline of the different types of FDGs conducted is below in Table 1.

Table 1. FGD Structure

County	Montserrado		Grand Bassa	
Site	**Rural site**	**Urban site**	**Rural site**	**Urban site**
FGD Types	Parents – men	Parents – men	Parents – men	Parents – men
	Parents – women	Parents – women	Parents – women	Parents – women
	Teachers – men	Teachers – men	Teachers – men	Teachers – men
	Teachers – women	Teachers – women	Teachers – women	Teachers – women
	Children – boys	Children – boys	Children – boys	Children – boys
	Children – girls	Children – girls	Children – girls	Children – girls
Subtotal	6 FGDs	6 FGDs	6 FGDs	6 FGDs
Total	**24 FGDs**			

The sampling of FGD participants was purposive and non-random. The project team worked with CEOs, DEOs and PTAs to identify participants that met the selection criteria (see Table 2) and who the CEOs, DEOs and PTAs believed to be important for the discussion.

Four schools were selected from the two counties using the 2015-16 EMIS data based on the availability of female teachers (at least six were needed per FGD). Experts from the MoE supported in the communication with the DEOs and principals of their respective sites, who assisted by inviting participants they believed to have knowledge of the issues.

Table 2. Composition of FGDs at Each Site

FGD Type	Intended Participants
Parents	Community leaders, parents/caregivers, respected people in the community, PTAs, others suggested by the CEO/DEOs
Teachers	Primary school teachers, ALP facilitators
Children	Out of school children, primary school children, children with disabilities

Each FGD was designed to have a maximum of 10 and a minimum of six participants per group. In total, 200 individuals participated in the FGDs. In one case, we had a FGD with only two participants; because we were utilizing outdated EMIS data, there were fewer female teachers at this site than expected.

Table 3. Number of participants in each FGD

County	Montserrado				Grand Bassa			
Site	**Rural site**		**Urban site**		**Rural site**		**Urban site**	
FGD Types	Parents – men	10	Parents – men	10	Parents – men	7	Parents – men	6
	Parents – women	10	Parents – women	10	Parents – women	8	Parents – women	10
	Teachers – men	8	Teachers – men	7	Teachers – men	6	Teachers – men	7
	Teachers – women	10	Teachers – women	10	Teachers – women	2	Teachers – women	6
	Children – boys	10	Children – boys	10	Children – boys	7	Children – boys	10
	Children – girls	10	Children – girls	10	Children – girls	6	Children – girls	10
Subtotal	58		57		36		49	
Total	**200**							

Finally, we conducted eight key informant interviews with teachers who work with children with disabilities (CWD). Half of the teachers came from a school for blind children and half from a school for deaf children, both located in a peri-urban area in Montserrado County and suggested to us by the Special Education Division of the MoE. Half of the teachers were male and half were female.

Table 4. KII Participants

No.	County	Gender	School
1	Montserrado	Male	School for blind children
2	Montserrado	Male	School for blind children
3	Montserrado	Female	School for blind children
4	Montserrado	Female	School for blind children
5	Montserrado	Male	School for deaf children
6	Montserrado	Male	School for deaf children
7	Montserrado	Female	School for deaf children
8	Montserrado	Female	School for deaf children

Collection Protocol and Ethics

Oral consent was obtained from all adults, as well as from the primary caregiver of youth participants. All data collection protocols, including the consent statements, were submitted to EDC's internal institutional review board (IRB), who determined the study met the criteria for exemption[1]. Due to high risk associated with questions around SRGBV and the ages of some participants (i.e., the students, who were minors), per the guidance of the EDC's IRB, questions on violence were not included in FGDs with children.

All the participants were invited to the respective schools and the FGDs were conducted in unoccupied rooms at each school. The FGDs and interviews were conducted by trained assessors hired and trained by EDC. Only male data collectors facilitated the FGDs or interviews with males, and females facilitated the female groups. At each FGD or interview, there was both a note taker recording by hand what was discussed, and a digital audio recorder recorded each discussion.

To maximize efficiency, the protocols for FGDs and interviews also included questions for the AQE Gender Assessment, so every FGD and interview was simultaneously collecting data for both the RERA and the Gender Assessment. Data was analyzed separately for each report.

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[1] The study was found to meet the criteria for Exempt Category 2: *Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.*

Data Analysis

EDC staff transcribed the FGDs and interviews using a combination of the assessors' notes and the audio recordings. The transcripts were then translated into Standard English summaries, which underwent qualitative analysis using the data analysis software QDA Miner. In QDA Miner, the summaries were coded based on our research questions so that common themes could be extracted from the text.

Context and Background

Country Context

Liberia is located in West Africa and gained its independence on July 26, 1847; it is Africa's oldest republic. Liberia has a population of 4.503 million people (The World Bank, 2017), comprised of more than 18 indigenous ethnic groups, as well as emancipated American slaves. The country is young and vibrant, and the median age is 18.3 years (Ibid.).

Liberia is organized unto 15 counties, though the majority of people live in Montserrado County (which includes the country capital, Monrovia) followed by Lofa, Bong, Nimba, and Grand Bassa (Government of Liberia, The World Bank, 2016). Kepelle is the largest ethnic group concentrated mainly in central and western Liberia. Although English is the official language, Liberia is a multilingual country where more than 30 languages are spoken (The World Factbook: Liberia, 2017). Nearly 70% of Liberians live on less than $1.90 per day, which is 20 percentage points higher than other developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Government of Liberia, The World Bank, 2016). However, poverty and food insecurity are acute, particularly in rural areas (World Food Programme, 2017). According to a 2015 emergency food security assessment, 16% of households are affected by food insecurity, and one fourth of Liberian families spend more than 65% of their total household expenditures on food (Ibid.).

Since the war ended, access to information has improved for about 66% of the population; however, Liberians in some parts of the country continue to rely predominantly on informal sources of information such as friends and family. Additionally, women are more likely to rely on informal sources of information than men. For those who do have access to media, radio is the main channel of information. (Vinck, Pham, and Kreutzer, 2011).

Liberia does not commonly experience large-scale natural disasters; however, it is exposed to various natural risks and hazards such floods, dust storms, and fires, as well as environmental threats such as deforestation, soil and sea erosion, loss of biodiversity, and pollution of coastal waters from oil residue and raw sewage (The World Factbook: Liberia, 2017).

Conflict and Crisis

From 1989 to 2003, Liberia endured intermittent civil war, which left the country economically and socially reeling and destroyed much of the public and private infrastructure of health services and schools (Schaberg and Williamson, 2008). During the war, more than 250,000 Liberians became refugees and another half million were internally displaced. Between 2004 and 2012, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) aided more than 155,000 Liberians to return to Liberia, and still others returned without assistance. Some Liberian refugees spent more than two decades living in other West African countries (The World Factbook: Liberia, 2017). By December 2004, a total of 103,912 individuals had been disarmed and demobilized, including 11,780 children (9,042 boys and 2,738 girls) (Schaberg and Williamson, 2008).

Notwithstanding the passing of time, distrust and misperceptions based on perceived participation in the war have not disappeared, and local and district peace building efforts have yet to penetrate the community level. Furthermore, school systems have not yet realized their potential to engage communities in open dialogue (Schaberg and Williamson, 2008). Key conflict dynamics continue to simmer at the sub regional and community levels. These include land and property disputes in Nimba County due to ethnic divisions and internal and cross-border migration, as well as dangerous levels of latent conflict in Lofa county owing to tensions between the Lorma and Mandingo ethnic groups.

Additional conflict drivers include sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), discrimination against people with disabilities, ex-combatants or single mothers, and low access to education in rural areas (UNICEF, 2015). Still other counties experience tensions between Islamic, Christian and traditional communities. Additional issues of security and justice include cross-border vulnerabilities with Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, and many judicial and governance systems lack accountability and transparency, which fosters feelings of mistrust toward government institutions, particularly at the community level (Ibid.). In order to facilitate peace, surveyed adult Liberians identified critical actions including uniting the tribes of Liberia, educating youth, reducing poverty, providing social services, uniting religious groups, and addressing land ownership disputes (Vinck, Pham, and Kreutzer, 2011).

The EVD Outbreak and Its Effect on the Education System and Community Cohesion

Since 2003, efforts to rebuild the country have been met with setbacks, including the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in 2014. The EVD outbreak led to 10,675 cases and 4,809 deaths and produced short and long-term economic impacts, including a reduced growth rate and disruption of economic activities across sectors. Vulnerable Liberians suffered the most from the outbreak, experiencing significantly reduced incomes and destroyed livelihoods, as well as food insecurity (Government of Liberia, The World Bank, 2016). Schools closed from August 2014 through February 2015. When schools reopened, two main factors hampered students' return to classes, the fear of contracting EVD and school fees (AIR, 2016). Financial constraints (school fees and school materials) constituted a significant challenge in reenrolling in school because the EVD outbreak disrupted many families' livelihoods. This was especially the case for girls (Ibid.). Girls listed several reasons for not returning to school including the loss of a family member who previously provided financial support, forced migration to new communities, and pregnancy. After the outbreak, schools in Bong, Lofa, and Grand Bassa reported damaged infrastructure, deficits in teaching staff and teaching and learning materials (AIR, 2016). Damaged infrastructure such as latrines and building doors lowered student morale and motivation for attending classes. Even though teachers were paid during the closure, once classes resumed, there were shortages of teachers across districts due to migration and other factors. Volunteer teachers helped to alleviate the deficit; however, lack of pay led to reduced motivation and weak commitment (Ibid.).

The outbreak also changed how students and teachers, as well as students and their peers, interacted with one another. Losing family members to the disease caused emotional and financial strains (AIR, 2016). Additionally, the outbreak caused many families to migrate, which changed the composition of local communities and social habits, as well as affecting familial support systems. Migration to new communities led to mistrust and fears that 'outsiders' carried the disease (Ibid.). PTAs assisted schools with health protocol implementation and mobilizing communities to reopen schools, including donation of their time (labor) and funds to rebuild damaged infrastructure (AIR, 2016). Parents and family members' perceptions of the value and importance of education were also critical in facilitating students' return to schools.

Socioeconomics and Health

Despite education efforts during the last 30 years, 47.3% of Liberians have no education (Government of Liberia, The World Bank, 2016). According to the 2014 Liberia Demographic and Health Survey, 33% of Liberian women between the ages of 15 and 34, and 13% of Liberian men had never been to school. An estimated one third of youth are not enrolled in school, training or employment, which increases pressure on social cohesion and stability in Liberia's pre-election context (Ibid.). Furthermore, 75% of the working population is employed in some form of vulnerable employment. According to the 2010

Labor Force Survey, the total labor force participation is 62.8%, of which 30.8% work in the formal sector, 36.6% in agriculture, and 28.9% in informal or household. According to the 2012 School-to-work Transition Survey (STWTS), the remaining 3.7% are unemployed. Among youth, nearly 40% of adolescents aged 15-17 are working (Ibid.).

Liberia has made significant gains in human development. Since the end of the civil war, gross national income (GNI) per capita in Liberia has nearly doubled and life expectancy at birth has increased by more than eight years. Female literacy has also increased, most notably among younger females (according to 2013 data, 69% of 15-19 year old females were literate compared to 29% of females aged 40-44)(Ibid.). The literacy rate of the general population is 62.4% for male Liberians and 32.8% for women (The World Factbook, 2017).

Several key health indicators have improved since 2003, including infant and under-five mortality rates (Government of Liberia, The World Bank, 2016). Despite these improvements, Liberia's maternal mortality rate remains among the worst in the world due to an unmet need for family planning, frequency of early childbirth, lack of quality obstetric care, high adolescent fertility, and a low proportion of births attended by a medical professional (The World Factbook: Liberia, 2017). The prevalence of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), which is practiced by 10 of Liberia's 16 tribes and affects more than two-thirds of women and girls, presents another health challenge (Ibid.). The national HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is 1.5%, (WHO, World Bank statistics 2013 as cited in Government of Liberia, The World Bank, 2016). Common illnesses include food or waterborne diseases (diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever); vector borne diseases (malaria, dengue fever, and yellow fever), schistosomiasis, Lassa fever, and rabies (The World Factbook: Liberia, 2017).

Findings: Secondary Data

As the first step in the RERA, EDC conducted a desk review of existing reports and data. This review provided the team with insight into the challenges faced by the Liberian education sector and their effect on children and youth, and most importantly, it allowed the team to identify information gaps that needed to be supplemented by primary data collection.

Risk Context

Children and Youth

Liberian children and youth confront various social and economic factors that contribute to their vulnerability, including malnutrition (resulting in child stunting) and other health issues, food insecurity, and extreme poverty. Additionally, those from vulnerable households are also more susceptible to external shocks and are more likely to be engaged in household economic and income generation activities at an early age. Other disparities further jeopardize a child's wellbeing and educational opportunities, including rural status, living with an illiterate head of household or one with low educational attainment, being a girl child, or going to an inadequately resourced school. The Government of Liberia has funded efforts to address issues of violence, gender inequality, and marginalization of rural and remote populations. However, the extreme levels and varied types of vulnerability make these issues difficult to address (Government of Liberia, World Bank, 2016). Girls are not excluded from access to education, and numerous programs exist to boost their enrolment rates. Nevertheless, girls and young women continue to face traditional cultural norms and gender roles at home and in the workforce, as well as disproportionate levels of violence, which negatively affect their agency and mobility.

Children are widely seen as a resource in Liberia. In Monrovia, especially in informal urban settlements, children are expected to earn money in the market or by other means in order to help with household and school expenses (UNICEF, 2015). While many boys and girls working on the street are part of a household, others are indeed homeless. In Liberia, 44% of Children aged 0-17 and 46% of children aged 0-14 are living with both biological parents. Another 23% of children under 18 are living with their biological mother and 8% are living with their father. One in every four Liberian children does not live with either biological parent (Better Care Network, 2015). It is commonplace for parents in Liberia and much of West Africa to send a child to live with an extended family member in an urban area, to have access to better educational opportunities (Schaberg and Williamson, 2008).

Education Context

Liberia has made strides during the past 30 years in the education sector, but 14 years of conflict and other development challenges have presented various setbacks. The 2014-15 EVD outbreak forced schools to close for almost a year to curb the spread of the disease (World Food Programme, 2017). Approximately 62%, or nearly two-thirds, of primary-aged children in Liberia are out of school (UNICEF, 2016). The uneven distribution of population and educational resources constitutes another challenge, as 75% of the estimated 4.5 million Liberians live in the 'big six' counties: Montserrado, Nimba, Bong, Lofa, Grand Bassa and Margibi. One third of the school aged population lives in Montserrado Country (Government of Liberia, World Bank, 2016). Lack of access to quality schools and vocational training opportunities fuels ongoing resentment among youth and parents. Concerns from communities include the high student-to-teacher ratio in primary school, school calendars that do not fit with agricultural demands, and the need for vocational as well as academic training. Children and youth

with disabilities also face additional exclusion and barriers to attending school (UNICEF, 2015). Furthermore, children from poor and rural households are less likely to attain basic education when compared to their wealthier, urban counterparts (Government of Liberia, World Bank, 2016). Most available data indicate that student literacy levels in early grades are low. Three baseline studies have been conducted, and the mean scores of third grade students in connected text oral reading fluency was fewer than 25 correct words per minute (Ibid.).

Challenges Facing the Liberian Education System

Education in Liberia is financed by multiple sources including the government, donors (more than 50%) and private contributions (Ibid.). Threats to the education sector include external shocks (macro-economic environment, food and climate shocks, and disease), population vulnerability (high levels of poverty, insecurity, and malnutrition) and patterns of marginalization and exclusion (Ibid.). Nearly 30% of primary school classrooms are located in makeshift and partitioned structures, and many do not protect students from the elements. In addition, there is also a shortage of water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, especially in rural schools (UNICEF, 2016). For example, more than four out of every 10 schools lack access to any source of water. Furthermore, scarce WASH facilities particularly impact adolescent girls who need appropriate facilities for menstrual hygiene. Challenges within the sector include school-level management, accountability, absenteeism, supervision, and other code of conduct violations, material and infrastructure support, including scarcity of teaching and learning materials, weak monitoring and management of school quality improvement, and a shortage of qualified teachers and trained school principals (Government of Liberia, World Bank, 2016). Currently, principals, District Education Officers (DEOs) and County Education Officers (CEOs) are expected to address school management issues, hold administrative hearings on teacher offenses and conduct regular school inspections; however, most lack the professional training, central office support, and material and financial resources required to successfully execute these tasks (Ibid.).

In the education system, there is variance among schools in the distribution of teachers, especially trained teachers. For example, the student-to-qualified teacher ratio (across all schools and all levels of education) is between 33.8 students to 90.0 students with a mean of 43.5 students per teacher. Furthermore, teachers account for approximately 85% of MoE expenditure, which leads to disparity in the allocation of MoE resources (Ibid.). It is also difficult to incentivize qualified teachers, especially female teachers, to serve in rural or less desirable areas (Ibid.). Liberian teachers endure difficult working conditions and often receive limited support. These include unsafe and worn infrastructure, lack of teaching and learning materials, adverse housing options, and pedagogical challenges such as classroom discipline, unfavorable student-teacher ratios, and multi-age/multi-level learners (Ibid.). There is also a sizeable gender gap in the teaching workforce; only 12% of public primary school teachers are women. In Lofa Country, only 5.7% are women (USAID, 2017). In rural areas, teachers are often absent for extended periods of time, leaving school to travel to collect their salaries. Additionally, Montserrado County has a disproportionate share of teachers due to the large number of non-government schools and teachers' preference to live in urban areas. While only approximately 20% of teacher are female nationwide, in Montserrado County, 50% of all teachers are female (Government of Liberia, World Bank, 2016).

In Liberia, there are several types of out-of-school and at-risk children. These include children who have never been to school, children who drop out of primary school in early grades, children who enroll late, or are severely overage for their grade, and children who are at risk for dropping out at the upper basic level. Reasons that school-aged children never attend primary school include never finishing pre-school, lack of money for school fees, perception of parents that they're too young, distance from home to

school, and parents who are not interested or not supportive of their attendance. Some of the main explanations of school dropout include lack of money for school fees, employment / household economic activities, and marriage. Additionally, school quality and violence also negatively influence school access and dropout. Another challenge is that many children do not have birth certificates. Late enrollment is widely accepted, as schools do not rigorously enforce age-appropriate enrollment policies (Ibid.).

Over aged children across all levels of the education system account for 82.4%, with 87.8% at primary education level. A high percentage of children and adolescents are not in school, having either dropped out or never enrolled (European Union, 2014). Grade 2 enrollment is consistently much lower than Grade 1 enrollment, which points to high levels of Grade 1 repetition and/or high rates of dropout between Grade 1 and Grade 2 (UNICEF, 2012). Approximately 40% of primary school students are three years older or more than the appropriate age for their grade. At all primary grade levels, the majority of enrolled students are 3-6 years older than the official age for the grade, and there is a wide distribution of age-ranges in each grade (Government of Liberia, World Bank, 2016).

Gender also impacts completion rates; the primary completion rate for boy children is 62% while that for girl children is 47% (DHS 2013) (Ibid.). More than 30% of males aged 15-24 have completed junior high and/or attained a higher level of education while fewer than 15% of females have achieved the same objective. Additionally, 29% of males have 'no education' compared to 43% of females aged 15-24. Liberia has realized recent improvements in the Gender Parity Index (GPI). At the primary and JH levels, GPI stands at 0.96 and 0.98 (Ibid.). Official MoE policy does not require girls or women to leave school or attend night school when they are pregnant. However, teachers and other education officials often direct or encourage them to do so as part of an informal, institutionally embedded practice. In a nation-wide study, 67% of households reported that pregnancy was the main reason for female school dropout (Ibid.).

Accelerated Learning and Education

Liberia launched an Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) in 1998 as a pilot to address the needs of out-of-school children; however, the program was not fully operational until the 2005–2006 school year (CFBT, UNESCO, and IIEP, 2009). Due to fragility and recurrent conflict, the program faced difficulties gaining momentum, and the MoE operated the program through 2012 (UNICEF, 2011). While donors continue to implement ALP activities, the scale of implementation is greatly reduced. Despite the phase out, ALP activities and strategies are reflected in the Education Sector Plan (2010-2020) and the Operational Plan (2014-2016). ALP is currently operating in nine counties, and Montserrado County has the highest ALP enrollment. The program has been offered in all 15 counties at one time or another, but enrolment has steadily declined from 75,820 (2008), to 36,000 (2010/11), to 4,533 (2014) and to 2,396 (2015) (Government of Liberia, World Bank, 2016). With the MoE's announcement of closing the ALP, there has been 'mass exodus' of ALP teachers to the formal system (Stella, 2011 as cited in Ibid.) The profile of ALP teachers is similar to that of the regular primary school teaching force, including the gender imbalance. For example, around 83% of ALP teachers are male. The majority of ALP teachers have completed secondary education, but very few have enrolled in or finished university (IBIS, 2013 as cited in Ibid.). Reasons for ALP dropout in order of highest percentage include relocation to other communities, work, predominantly in the goal mines, and pregnancy or child care duties (including boys, lack of motivation or poor results, and sickness) (IBIS, 2011 as cited in Ibid.).

In addition to ALP, Alternative Basic Education (ABE) assists learners 13 and up to develop or enhance literacy, numeracy, work readiness and life skills. Both programs are based on the Liberian primary

school national curriculum. While the programs have been effective in addressing the needs of out of school children, youth and adults, they do not appear to have addressed the root causes of late enrollment, overage enrollment, lack of access to primary education and primary school dropout (Government of Liberia, World Bank, 2016).

Inclusive Education

A reported 22.3% of children in the school system are disabled, but there are only four specialized institutions that cater to the needs of disabled children in Liberia (UNICEF, 2012). While the MoE has a Division of Special and Inclusive Education, there is currently no policy or budget for inclusive education. Some of the main issues identified during 2016 Education Sector Analysis include: severe undercounting of the number of children with special needs in EMIS data and a lack of training in inclusive pedagogy at Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs). Currently, EMIS tracks deaf and blind children but not those with learning disabilities, those with physical disabilities that limit their mobility, or any others (Government of Liberia, World Bank, 2016).

Parent and Community Engagement

In Liberia, 93% of schools have a Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and 71% of these meet four or more times per year. The MoE has offered PTA training in more than 2,000 schools, using the PTA Operational Manual, as well as leveraged partnerships with NGOs to train PTAs on critical social issues, including girls' education, GBV, the code of conduct, school feeding, psychosocial support and psychological first aid (Ibid.). Parent and community participation has increased, but there is still a need to strengthen this participation. In many cases, parents do not have clear expectations of how local schools and teachers should behave or a strong sense of how they can play a positive role in the education and development of children in their community. In 2015, preliminary payroll scans suggested that up to 5,000 'ghost' teachers were on payroll (MoE and LTTP II 2015). More than 1,100 teachers have been removed based on this assessment, resulting in an estimated annual savings of more than $1.5 million (Ibid.).

There is severe inequality between girls' and boys' access to education as a result of patriarchal attitudes and practices. Covering girls' education costs is often viewed as a waste of money, and parents are generally more willing to support their sons' education when there are financial constraints (GOAL Plus, 2016). Additionally, the war increased parents' concerns for their daughters' safety, and parents are reluctant to allow their daughters to travel to school, especially as cases of rape and sexual harassment have increased (Stromquist et al., 2013). Parents also rely on their daughters' contribution to household production and management. Girls from vulnerable families are more likely to have uneducated parents who do not see the importance of education. Additionally, girls from poor families may engage in relationships with men who can support them financially, including payment of their school fees. Girls often marry before they finish primary school, some as early as 13–14 years old. In junior and senior high school, girls who have not married face increasing pressure to assume domestic roles. Many girls have family responsibilities while attending school, and without their parents' or husbands' support, few graduate from high school. There are also fewer female teachers serving as role models in the education system, and they themselves face obstacles (Ibid.).

Parents also lack an understanding of the value of education and its related demands such as home study, regular attendance, and progress through the education system. A 2016 survey conducted by Street Child found that 45% of girls reported that one or both parents had never been to school. Moreover, 62% of out-of-school girls' mothers had never attended school, which is significantly higher than that for mothers of in-school girls at 43%. (Street Child, 2016) Furthermore, many parents are

unaware of the government's policies and initiatives related to girls' education. For example, in a survey conducted in 2012, only 51% of parents were aware of these policies (Plan International West Africa Regional Office, 2012).

Liberian students are often motivated by promises of rewards and fear of punishment from teachers and parents rather than inner aspirations (Gbollie and Keamu, 2017). Furthermore, while parents generally express a desire for their children to be educated, they are often not involved in this process and may expect the school to assume full responsibility. This is due in part to high illiteracy rates and busy schedules (Ibid.). An additional factor restricting parents' participation in their children's schooling is the language barrier, as students are taught in English at school but often communicate in local dialects at home (Boayue, 2014). However, PTAs and communities have the opportunity to hold teachers and local schools accountable through monitoring of education quality and teacher attendance and performance (Gordon, 2013). While communities have demonstrated their willingness to support ALP programs, the process often takes time, especially in rural areas where there are higher levels of illiteracy and a need for healing and social inclusion after years of war (Ibid.).

Gender Context

Since 2005, the GoL has instituted various reforms aimed at restoring the educational infrastructure in the country. However, barriers to achieving gender equitable education outcomes remain a significant challenge. As of 2013, more than 90% of children were too old for their grade level, often leading to dropout and ultimately, poor educational outcomes, particularly for girls. Approximately 63% of boys of primary school age are out of school compared to 67% of girls of the same age. Nearly 29% of female youth of secondary school age are out of school compared to 21% of male youth. (GOAL, 2013)

Women and girls are underrepresented in nearly all levels of education, including upper basic, senior high, TVET, tertiary education, RTTIs and the teaching force. Girls account for 47% of secondary school students and women account for less than 10% of the teaching force (all levels combined). Reasons for underrepresentation of girls in secondary education include household financial constraints, early marriage, and pregnancy. Due to overage enrollment, many girls transition into adolescence at the upper basic level, which increases their vulnerability to sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation. Additionally, lack of appropriate WASH facilities and sanitary materials further hinder their attendance and performance at school (Government of Liberia, World Bank, 2016; Gbollie and Keamu, 2017).

Poverty, gender and rural status intersect in ways that disadvantage some children more than others and decrease the likelihood that some will complete a primary education. DHS 2013 data indicate that primary completion rates (PCR) in Liberia vary by gender, urban-rural status and the intersection of these variables. For example, the PCR for male children is 62% and 47% for female children. The PCR for girls living in rural areas from poor households is 13%. The PCR for boys living in urban areas from wealthy households is 86%, which is nearly six times higher. As indicated in previous sections, poverty also makes girls more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The median years of educational attainment for youth from the poorest households is 3.1 years compared to 9.9 years of education for youth from the wealthiest households. For a young woman from a poor, rural household, the median years of education attainment is 1.8 years (Government of Liberia, World Bank, 2016). While the literacy gap between men and women is narrowing among younger Liberians, there is still a strong imbalance of literacy by gender, locality and wealth groups. Additionally, Liberian women are less likely to be educated than men, and when they have attained some level of education, it is likely to be lower than their male counterparts. However, some progress has been made for younger women. For example, while 90% of women aged 55-64 have no education, this drops to 43% among women aged 15-24.

Furthermore, one of the most acute issues facing Liberians is exploitation and violence, which are woven into daily life. During the conflict, violence was used as a weapon of war. However, violence continues to impact men and women, boys and girls in Liberia at multiple levels. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is common and disproportionately affects Liberian girls and women. This extends to the school system (UNICEF, 2015). Transactional sex and harassment by teachers is common, and early pregnancy often undermines girls' educational prospects. The GoL criminalized rape in 2005, and those convicted face a maximum penalty of life in jail. However, due to weak judicial systems, most perpetrators are not brought to justice. Half of reported rape cases are attacks against girls between the ages of 10 and 15 (Allemano, Miller Wood and Walker, 2009). Furthermore, Liberia has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the world, indicating early sexual activity, and sexual violence and abuse often affects girls in the 6- to 12-year-old age bracket (Schaberg and Williamson, 2008).

Main Barriers to Education Access, Retention and Success

Sociocultural Factors

Children and youth in Liberia experience five broad categories of violence. These include domestic violence (including beatings, harmful punishments, and denial to education perpetrated principally by parents and guardians), SGBV (experienced disproportionally by girls and including early/forced marriage, prostitution and sexual violence), child exploitation (child labor and child trafficking), violence at school (harsh punishment, sexual violence, bribes and work for grades), and social violence (occurring in a community which creates fear and insecurity within youth; street and gang violence, or harassment of young children) (Delomez, 2015). Violence is exacerbated by poverty, lack of knowledge about child rights, limited conflict resolution techniques and gender inequality. Child protection laws are limited and not enforced, especially in rural areas. There is a need for more education on child rights, safe play areas, strengthened legislation on child welfare, more social awareness raising, violence-free schools, support for youth association, and more vocational and technical education and opportunities. The widespread of SGVB affects both boys and girls at school and at home. This includes sex for grades, transactional sex for school fees, early marriage, FGM/C, and corporal punishment. Students may fear for their safety at school, and parents may delay enrollment for safety issues. Additionally, the mitigation response to SGVB often focuses on punishment over prevention, but systems are not well known or followed. Perpetrators of violence are often not prosecuted or brought to justice. Due to social and gender norms, victims may be blamed and face gender discriminatory attitudes. In situations when young women become pregnant, school principals and teachers often require that girls or women leave school or attend night school when they are pregnant, which leads to drop out. This is not an official MoE policy; however, it has become an informal, institutionally embedded practice (Government of Liberia, World Bank, 2016). Furthermore, young women from vulnerable and marginalized households are at higher risk for engaging in transactional sex.

Other marginalized groups include children and people with disabilities. These groups face stigma in their communities and are less likely to have access to education due to lack of infrastructure and community attitudes and perceptions. Again, poverty increases the prevalence and risk of exclusion.

In general, students from marginalized households often have lower education and less economic power, which increases their dependency and vulnerability. The prevalence of traditional gender roles and norms pose a barrier to both boys' and girls' educational prospects.

Even though the civil war ended more than a decade ago, violence is still pervasive at school and at home. Certain groups are more at risk for violence including girls, children and youth with disabilities, orphans, and children from vulnerable households where parents may lack education or the ability to

cover school costs, which may lead to the need for 'sponsors'. Additionally, teachers and parents are also dealing with effects of trauma as both victims and perpetrators of violence. There are also perceptions that overage enrollment is normal due to nearly all students being overage. Other challenges are that some children do not have a birth certificate or are not aware of their age. Outside of the ABE interventions, which have largely been led by AYP, most of the opportunities available for alternative education are concentrated in urban areas.

Health Factors

Malnutrition is still common and disproportionately affects women and children, stunting and underweight in under-five at 32% and 15% respectively (WHO, World Bank statistics 2013) (Government of Liberia, World Bank, 2016). Malnutrition may lead to late enrollment and affect children's ability to develop physically and mentally. Due to the recent EVD outbreak, parents and communities may mistrust schools, and families that contracted Ebola face stigma at school and in the community. Due to the extended school closures and undue financial stress on students' families due to the effects of the outbreak, more vulnerable children and youth were forced to drop out of school, which for young women and girls, increased their chances of becoming pregnant and/or facing SGBV (GOAL, 2016).

Economic Factors

Despite the improvements in security since the end of the war, violence continues to preoccupy many Liberians. This includes violence against women and girls and economic and crime-related violence. During the war, violence was collective and politically motivated; however, crime and violence are now largely committed for economic reasons (Liberia Armed Violence Assessment, 2017). Poverty is a major factor leading to violence against children and youth. The poorest children are commonly subjected to several forms of violence and there is a lack of knowledge about children's rights and alternative methods of resolving violent conflict. Children who do not live with their parents are especially vulnerable, subjected to exploitation and poor treatment with few protective mechanisms available (Schaberg and Williamson, 2008).

School-related Factors

The formal education system faces various challenges, including educational quality and school management issues (Government of Liberia, World Bank, 2016). ALP programs often draw upon the same resources as those in the formal system (such as teachers and curriculum), which may lead to conflict over who should receive resources. Lack of resources also adds a challenge for county and district education officers to carry out adequate supervision of violence and management issues in schools. There are also infrastructure and school safety issues, including lack of WASH facilities, demand/supply challenges, and lack of school principal and teacher training (Ibid.). Some challenges include those within the realm of project and ALP scope (such as school safety, transactional sex, and prevalence of SRGBV), as well as those that are external or beyond the ALP sites/programs (such as early marriage and early pregnancy). Challenges to be addressed through the Liberia AQE project include teacher recruitment, quality of ALP programs (teacher training, materials development), linkages to the formal system, and monitoring of ALP sites, etc.

Political Factors

When Liberia's civil war finally ended in 2003, there were no more than 1,000 schools in operation: over 50% of the country's schools had been destroyed (Conneh, 2008). Even though 14 years have passed, Liberia is still in the process of rebuilding its educational system. Additionally, the EVD outbreak

created another setback as more than 4,400 Liberian schools were closed for six months, leaving 1.5 million children without access to formal education until schools were deemed safe to reopen (USAID, 2017b).

Information Gaps in Secondary Data

In preparation for the collection of primary data, the team identified several areas in the research where more information was needed to inform the project's work strengthening Liberia's ALP system. These gaps included information on the potential for disputes and difficulties and mitigating factors in communities where there is access to both formal schools and ALPs. Another area where more information was needed was around issues of access and retention in education programs, including reasons why children might never start school or why some might start school and then leave. Additionally, questions remained about who makes the decision to send children to school and who or what encourages them to continue in school or an ALP program; since the last ALP interventions were in 2011, existing data on ALP in Liberia is extremely limited. The team also wanted to find out whether there are different perceptions about the importance of educating children, especially children with disabilities, as any information about children with disabilities was largely absent from the literature.

Findings: Primary Data

The primary data collection allowed the team to gather key information, some of which corroborated what had been gathered during the desk review, as well as to fill in gaps. Findings were grouped into the following: issues to school access and retention, including barriers to and supports for access; relationships between ALPs and formal schools; and perceptions about education for children with disabilities.

Issues in School Access and Retention

Barriers to Access

Teachers, students, and parents universally reported that there are many out of school children between the ages of 8 and 15 in their communities. One mother in an urban area of Grand Bassa even noted that there were "one hundred or more."

There were many common themes in the reasons that the respondents gave for children being out of school.

- Two of the most common reasons across all the groups—parents, teachers, and children—were the families' **poverty** and the children's **ages**. Many families cannot afford the school fees, or cannot afford school supplies and uniforms, sometimes because they have many children; some families also keep their children, especially girls, home to work on the farm, or some children may choose to leave to go earn money. Another frequent response was that if a child was overaged, they would feel uncomfortable or ashamed to be in a classroom with small children, and this would keep them out of school.
- All of the groups also noted that there were issues around **families and children's willingness for them to attend school.** While there are certainly children who wish to go to school but their parents cannot afford it, participants said there are also parents who have the money and willingness for their children to attend school but their children refuse to go. "They don't want to be under restriction," noted one student. Parents, teachers, and children all mentioned **peer pressure** as something keeping children away from school; sometimes children "follow bad friends" and join them in staying out of school. On the other hand, some parents also are not serious about their children's educations; a parent noted that other parents "do not control" their children. A teacher also noted, "parents are not focusing on education of their children. They do not pay attention when they come to school and go back home and as a result the children do not come to school."
- Parents and teachers also explained that some students are discouraged from attending school when the lessons become difficult; one teacher noted, "they don't study, so after they have noticed that they have not scored good grades to pass the exam, they will drop [out]."
- Some parents and children noted **issues with teachers** as barriers to access. One parent named teacher absenteeism as discouraging children from attending school, and another parent said children may stay away from school because the teacher beats them. A few children noted that children stay away from school when they are ashamed or angry because they have been admonished or embarrassed by their teacher.
- Another salient issue was **children's living arrangements.** Several respondents noted that if a child is living with someone other than their parents, for example, an uncle or aunt, this could lead to them dropping out of school. This could happen when one or both parents dies. Teachers and parents also mentioned living in **single parent homes** as a cause of children

being out of school. However, it is not clear why these situations lead to lower school enrollment.

- A few other issues mentioned (though less frequently) include the long distance from home to school and the migration of families from one place to another.
- Finally, a great number of respondents mentioned **teenage pregnancy and sexual relationships** as causing girls to drop out of school. This issue is explored in more depth in the Gender Assessment.

Supports for Access

However, our focus group participants felt strongly about the importance of education and described what motivated or encouraged students to learn. While they almost universally agreed that parents were the ones who make decisions around whether to send a child to school, they named a number of other factors that could encourage or enable children to attend, described below.

Children's responses. Many children expressed that education would enable them to become a better person and a productive member of society. "My mother considers sending me to school because she wants me to be someone great in the future," said one child. Another child believes that education will enable him to become a leader.

Many children also were motivated by their desire to help their families or improve their living standards. On the other hand, they explained that their parents invested in their educations so that they would be able to support their parents in their old age.

> "When I see some of my friends them graduating, I want to be like them, it can encourage me. My brother and friends by helping me with my lesson and telling me school is good and it is for me to be a better person tomorrow. Because education is very good when you decide to go to school and learn good book, you will become great and you will not be like the other people so it can really encourage me to come to school every day."

A great number of children also were encouraged to attend school by their parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, who did not receive an education themselves. Children also described a sort of positive peer pressure motivating them to learn; they wanted to attend school to be with their friends, or because their friends encourage them. "There is pain sitting home and not going to school while your friends are going," said one child. "My friends and my sisters saw that I am not going to school and say, '*Pah,* what happened, you are not going to school?'" explained another.

A few children mentioned that the way they were supported to attend school is because their parents were selling goods, producing charcoal, or working other small jobs to pay for their education.

> "The world now runs on education; you cannot get a job easily now without knowledge in computer and scientific method, so for that reason, education is serious. It is not like before; everything one does here on earth is education and money. The height you learn, the height you earn."

Parents' responses. Parents named similar beliefs about schooling as the children did: they said that investing in children's education was important so that children could take care of them when they grow old, some said that they want their children to go to school because they themselves were unable to, and they said that education helps a child become "a better person for the future."

One parent described that they "don't want their children to continue to live in a circle of poverty" and did not want

their children to grow up dependent on them. Another described how proud it made them when their friends could see their child graduating from school.

They mentioned various factors that can support or encourage children to attend school, including the following:

- The regular presence of teachers in school (low absenteeism)
- Availability of sporting activities for students
- Encouragement from parents and care and attention towards their children's educations
- Parents and community members encouraging other parents to support their children's educations
- A positive and safe learning environment in the school, including fencing and good facilities
- Role models in the community, for example, pointing girls towards women representatives and women working in clinics
- School feeding programs, including meals prepared by parents at school, or ensuring children have cash to buy lunch or can eat before school
- Providing children with school supplies
- Counseling, i.e., helping children plan for their futures

Teachers' responses. Teachers reaffirmed parents' and students' beliefs: that parents know that education can create a better life for their children, and that education is the "key to success." They also mentioned that parents and children are motivated to pursue education when they see that other children are going to school as well.

> "As a teacher if you are teaching and your students are not picking the lesson you have to assess. You are the grandpa or ma in the class for the children. You have to talk to the child to know the problem. As a teacher if you have a student who is slow you have to call the child during recess and go over the lesson. This will help the child."

As for the teacher's own role in promoting education access, several mentioned the importance of "encouraging" and "motivating" the children themselves. "As a teacher," said one, "if the child has problem at home, you call the child and talk to him or her, because most of the ALP students are overgrown so they need encouragement." Another teacher mentioned that if a teacher sees a child in his or her community, they must talk to the parents to convince them to send the child to school.

However, teachers also noted the importance of other community members. "The community is where they get some of the education," said one teacher. "Local government, the chief and elders can influence the children to go school."

Many respondents noted the importance of the classroom environment created by the teacher. A child-friendly learning environment, with creative and caring teaching, will encourage students to continue in school, they said.

Some of their suggestions for ways to improve school access include the following:

- Free education provided by the government (no school fees)
- Material support: governments or NGOs providing school uniforms, copybooks, book bags, soap, slippers
- School feeding programs
- Proper facilities, e.g. classrooms contain chairs
- Afterschool activities and facilities like sports, debate activities, and playgrounds

- Awards or gifts for students
- Advocacy by the government to convince parents to send children to school

Relationships Between ALPs and Formal Schools

Overage Children

Because ALPs are targeted at children who are below grade level for their age, we asked participants about the issue of overaged children in classrooms. Respondents consistently reported that there were many difficulties associated with children who were too old for their grade, especially that the younger students make fun of the older students, and the older students feel ashamed to be in the same class as younger students. The young students sometimes call the older students "grandma" or "grandpa." This sometimes causes the overaged students to drop out of school. One teacher pointed out that it is embarrassing for an overaged child to wear the uniform of the lower school.

Another problem with mixed ages in classroom is that, as one child described, "Some children, when they are 15 years old, they can be matured, and when they are among the small children they can tell them all kinds of things - like teaching them about man and woman business [sex]." They may "put their ways or pressure on the younger ones," or bully them because they are bigger and stronger, stealing their lunches or "knocking their heads" at recess.

A number of respondents also noted that older children will often have difficulty learning at the speed of the appropriately aged children. This may cause the older students to be "shy to answer" questions in class.

Regarding the issue of what constitutes an "overaged" child, we asked the children, parents, and teachers what age was too young to begin grade 1, and what age would be too old.

When asked what is the appropriate age for a child to be to enter grade one, responses raged from about 3 to 10 years old, but most said between 5-7[2].

When assessors asked the respondents what age was too late for a child to enter grade 1, the responses varied widely, from a low of 8 years old to a high of 50 (and one who said "It is never too late if they are determined"). The average response was 10-13 years old.

Awareness and Perceptions of ALPs

None of the children in our FGDs were aware of ALPs or knew what they were. Awareness among parents was mixed: about half of the groups did not have any participants familiar with ALPs. More teachers knew about ALPs, but a few did not.

Parents described ALPs as schools meant for overaged children, which have classes in the afternoon, and levels instead of grades. One group described ALPs as more tailored to their students' learning needs: "In the regular schools, the teachers are not patient with the children, but in an ALP school the teachers are patient minded and monitor the students," described one parent. "In an ALP program, teachers focus on the lesson until the students understand." One parent also noted that ALPs have predetermined lesson plans, but in regular schools, teachers must plan the daily lessons.

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[2] According to Ministry of Education standards, a grade 1 student should be 6 years old, and any grade 1 student over 6 is consider overaged.

Teachers described the difference between ALPs and mainstream schools as ALPs having a more condensed curriculum. They described ALPs as three-year, three-level programs for overaged children, taking them through grades 1 through 6. Some teachers also distinguished that ALPs have trained teachers. One teacher noted that "the ALPs were helpful after the war."

> "At ALP (Accelerated Learning Program) level no one is ashamed, it makes learning easy. To me it is very essential if it comes back in our system."

A few parents offered their impressions on the quality of ALPs. "The ALP center is better than the regular because the ALP is seriously monitored," said one. Another, however, "I feel good about the regular program. In the regular school, they learn the regular lesson, and in the ALP, they 'fast track' [the lesson is condensed]."

Teachers were positive about ALP quality. They noted that they hire qualified teachers to teach in ALP, and they have extra training compared to mainstream school teachers, and that ALPs are successful at helping overaged children catch up with their peers. This could not be directly confirmed by secondary data

Deciding Between ALP and Formal School

Parents gave various answers about whether they would send their children to ALPs or to formal schools:

- "When the child is over school age we send to ALP," said one parent.
- Another prefers "the regular school, because the children are regularly in school."
- One father will send them "to the regular program because I want them to be busy all day, and the regular is all about to educate their mind."
- One of the respondents said he will send his child to an ALP school because he believes that "proper teaching is done and children are well monitored" in an ALP. The other participants did not object.
- "Due to lack of money, I prefer ALP," said a mother.

Teachers, on the other hand, focused on student age as the deciding factor for whether a child should attend ALP or formal school. However, one teacher noted that ALP is better because it "deals with the integrated subject," while another "prefers regular [schools] because ALP doesn't [teach] all the subjects."

Respondents generally did not see a difference between the safety of regular schools or ALPs, except a few who noted concerns about students' ages, i.e., the older students in ALPs may be involved in sexual activities. One parent mentioned it could be a concern if ALP classes release students late at night.

Transitioning from ALPs to Formal School

Some teachers and parents said there would not be problems moving from ALPs to formal school, while others said the difference between the programs could be challenging to students. For example, they may encounter a different teaching style in the formal school than they had in ALP (one parent suggested ALP teachers may be more patient, caring, and committed), and they will have to study new subjects that they did not have in ALP.

It may also be challenging if ALP was free, but formal school requires paying school fees. Finally, if students are transitioning back into a grade for which they are still overaged—for example, a 16-year-old entering grade 7—there could be the same challenges described in *Overage Children*, above.

When we asked parents and teachers when children should move from ALP to formal school, most believed they should do so after they complete level 3 (equivalent to completing grade 6). As for other possible transition times, one teacher noted, "We cannot stop them; if they found it necessary to move to regular school then they can ask for transfer." A few other respondents said it would be appropriate to move before completing level 3 if the monitoring team feels the child has improved enough, if the student is advancing too quickly, or if donors close the ALP.

Other Issues Around Safety and Conflict

In our discussions about school safety and issues between teachers and parents, a number of issues arose about challenges in the formal school system that will be important to address in the project's ALPs.

Children noted that corporal punishment is a problem in schools. One student described teachers whipping students until they bled.

Parents also described conflicts arising between parents, teachers, and children. They said children can be disrespectful to teachers, and teachers can be intimidating to students. Furthermore, when teachers discipline students, sometimes the parents object, saying "they sent their children to school to learn and to not be disciplined by teachers." One parent noted that "some parents come to school to attack the administration." This can be difficult for the child, another noted, if it causes the teacher to turn against the child. They suggested that these issues could be solved by calling upon the administration and organizing regular PTA meetings where issues can be settled.

Parents also described issues of violence in schools: "older students beat the younger ones, school principal always beats students." In this case, the child might report the incident to the parents, who will approach the school principal, and if nothing is done, they will take it to the community. One parent also mentioned that older students might drink alcohol or bring weapons to class.

Teachers also expressed concerns about the same issue of parents aggressively confronting teachers for beating students or sending them home for dress code infractions. Teachers suggest solving the problem by holding a private meeting where the teachers explain the school regulation. They may also hold an administrative meeting, and elevate it to the level of a PTA executive meeting if necessary.

Specific issues around SRGBV are discussed in detail in the Gender Assessment.

Children with Disabilities

Beliefs about CWD

These teachers all had positive impressions about children with disabilities and their potential to learn.

> "I feel good about the children, **God gave them for us, and we need to give them love**. It is very, very important to educate children with disabilities."

All of them said that it was "important" to educate children with disabilities. Several pointed out that children with disabilities are not just objects of charity, but have the potential to be productive members of society: "They can work in the government offices if they learn," said one teacher, "and if they get opportunity the can learn how to make business; they can trade like others and can be helpful to the society."

Another teacher offered, "It is very important to educate children with disabilities as it will reduce weight on the government. The children will be able to equip themselves with education so that they

will qualify for employment. If they are employed they will not go to the streets for begging." Multiple respondents mentioned that education will help CWDs avoid becoming beggars.

When these teachers were asked about the traditional or tribal beliefs around children with disabilities, they were much less positive. Multiple teachers mentioned that traditionally, people believe that a disability in a child is caused by something the parent has done. Another common theme was that it is a waste of time and money to invest in children with disabilities, and that CWD are liabilities: "They feel bad, they feel that people with disabilities are useless, they don't have anything to do in society, they will sit back in the corner and just keep them down the whole day."

> "There is a man with disability—visually impair—he has a Master's degree. I advised the children with disability to **be serious in their education like him**. There are also others like him graduated from colleges and who are currently employed and working."

Another mentioned, "Sometimes the parents hide the child."

> "Nothing can come out of the child again once the child is blind, I mean **all is over**, that [is] how more parents feel."

A participant noted that some of their students with disabilities are Muslims and some are Christians; both had bad prior experiences, regardless of their religious background. Teachers, he explained, "talk to them so that they can forget what has happened [the bad experiences] at their background."

One teacher mentioned that many children arrive with internalized ableism: "The children come with the same belief [about themselves], but we tell them to forget about those beliefs. But respect people and your parents."

Issues of Education Access for CWD

Due to these negative beliefs about children with disabilities, these children often lack access to educational opportunities. Several teachers mentioned that parents, already poor, prefer to spend the little resources they have on their children without disabilities, rather than paying for the uniforms, school fees, and transportation costs for deaf or blind children. Since schools for deaf and blind children are not common, the distance to school can be an even greater barrier than it is for children attending mainstream schools. Furthermore, some parents who bring their children to schools for the deaf and blind do not return for them, essentially abandoning them.

A few teachers also mention that the children are not willing to come to school or are "tired of learning." One suggested that CWD "do not show any seriousness" and would prefer to beg for money than to attend school. However, another teacher mentioned that these children can be exploited, too: "In the community, most of the people can just use the deaf and other children with disability to be their bread winner."

> "Parents leave the deaf without support, because they are not interested in them. Some families have money to send two or three children in normal school for skill learning, but **when it comes to the child with disabilities the parents do not have money for it**."

"Some of the reasons or the parents feel that they are already been cheated, God give them child that are not correct so most of them keep them at the backed seat."

One teacher described their advocacy efforts to encourage parents and communities to give their children with disabilities access to education. Although they tell them "their children can be used for the future" and they "can be better citizens tomorrow," even sharing examples of people with disabilities who have gone abroad, "the parents want them stay home and tell us not to bother them about the

children with disability."

Integration of CWD in Mainstream Schools

These teachers were asked, "If there was no school for blind or deaf children, do you think the regular schools could help children with disabilities?" Most teachers responded that it would not be possible because of lack of supports: for example, there would be no sign language interpreters for deaf schools, and oral exams may not be available for blind students. Teachers noted that mainstream teachers would need more training, for example, in braille, for CWD to attend; one said it would be possible to send CWD to mainstream schools "by assigning teachers in various regular schools."

> "Especially let me speak for the blind; you have to come and get training on how to read and write. **How will they copy lesson if they do not learn how to read and write which is oral?** You have to be able to respond to the questions during the exam for the West African Examination Council (WAEC). During WAEC all is writing there is no oral test. So, it is somehow impossible to go to the regular school. Special schools for the blind and deaf is very important."

One teacher at the school for deaf children believed that although it would be impossible for deaf children to attend without an interpreter, blind children, since they can hear and talk, can "integrate in the normal school" without issue. Similarly, another teacher for deaf children noted that "the blind and the handicapped" can go to ordinary school.

Another teacher noted that it is extremely difficult for mainstream schools to accept blind and deaf children, but she knew of one who did enroll some, after much discussion with the principal.

Solutions

Advocacy. Several teachers mentioned the importance of advocacy efforts: going out to recruit children with disabilities to their schools and convincing parents that they should send them. However, they believe that government support will enhance their efforts, as the parents often "do not come around"; "some of these problems could be solved by the Ministry of Education coming in," said one teacher." "Once the government shows that concern, said another, "most of them will go to school and stay in school."

Another respondent noted that first, advocacy *towards* the government is needed. "Parents and communities must join hands and should inform the government about the status of their children," they noted.

Material support. Many teachers expressed that free schooling is necessary for children with disabilities to have access to education, since so many parents are unwilling or unable to pay school fees for these children. As one teacher described, "many of them want to go to school but there is no support."

A few teachers also suggested that the government should use material support—for example, school supplies—to encourage children to attend school. "By encouraging the child providing the education materials you can make the child go to school. Sometimes parents are not willing to buy stationery for the child with disability but buy for the others and this discourages the child feeling as, 'My parents are buying this for the other children but are not buying it for me.'"

Family love and concern. Finally, many teachers expressed that families and communities need to show greater love and care towards their children with disabilities. They must love them, show concern

for them, and support them the same way they support their children without disabilities.

Conclusions

Teachers and parents see the difficulties and challenges that arise in the classroom due to overaged children, and their views on the appropriate age to start school are generally consistent with MoE policy. Community members also say they value education while acknowledging that many children are not in school. This suggests that there will be a high demand for quality ALP services, despite the relatively low level of knowledge about ALP in general.

Nonetheless, there are significant barriers to access, which may adversely affect ALP classes if not appropriately addressed. These include the cost of schooling as well as safety concerns ranging from harsh corporal punishment to bullying and sexual violence. These issues disproportionately affect girls, as well as other vulnerable groups such as children from poor families, children with disabilities, and those living with one or no parents.

In addition to addressing school safety, respondents noted that improving teacher attendance as well as more inclusive and positive teaching styles could improve retention. They also highlighted the importance of appropriate school facilities as well as access to play spaces and after-school activities. As poor performance is also a reason that some children drop out of school, strategies for addressing low performance will likely also help improve retention.

Most teachers and some parents had heard of ALP, and had generally positive views of the quality of ALP programs. However, there were some concerns about the timing of schooling if the program was not a full day or if students were released after dark. There were also different understandings of what class subjects are indeed covered by ALP, creating varying opinions about whether ALP is better or worse than formal schools. Some parents said that they would like to send their children to ALP over formal schools due to the perceived higher quality of ALPs, and this could be a potential for conflict that the program will need to address when deciding on learner eligibility policy.

In terms of CWD, we recognize that our data was skewed because we only spoke with teachers at special schools for children with disabilities. Our findings point that it can be difficult for regular schools to have resources to accommodate CWD, ALPs will need to carefully consider how to best support CWD

Our findings highlighted the key role that the PTA can play in resolving disputes,

Implications for Programming

This activity now needs to use the findings from the FGDs and interviews, combined with analysis of secondary data, to better understand the implications for programming across multiple tasks and deliverables required within the activity. Grounded in the secondary data and looking at the analysis of parents', teachers', and children's statements in line with the key sub-activities, we can apply this information to planning and design and identify where there are remaining gaps to address through other activities and assessments. Our key takeaways are outlined below.

Establishment of ALPs

- A few parents and teachers reported that it is important for schools to be furnished with seats for children, and have appropriate safety features like fences and separate sanitation facilities for girls and boys. This is in line with the project's planned activities to rehabilitate sites.

- There is some evidence that schools are still charging fees despite the fact that they are supposed to be free of cost; this could lead to pressure for ALPs to accept non-eligible children whose parents are pursuing lower cost educational opportunities. We recommend the project ensure parity of the fee structure between the formal school and ALP in the community to mitigate any potential conflict.

- The cost of schooling includes not only school fees, but incidental expenses such as uniforms and school supplies. Providing these items would significantly lower cost to parents, a major barrier for schooling, and many respondents expressed their belief that it would improve enrollment and retention. This finding is in line with the project's planned procurement and delivery of supply packages to sites.

- The timing of ALP classes will have large implications for which children will attend. Our findings indicate that some parents want their children to be busy at school all day to keep them away from undesirable activities, while some families want their children to be out of school to be available for income generating activities. If ALPs can provide activities for children during the portion of the day that classes are not in session, it will both keep children occupied and away from labor.

Curriculum

- Some respondents were concerned that the ALP curriculum did not cover all the necessary content areas. ALP curriculum should be mapped to the formal school curriculum and meaningfully equivalent in order to ensure students' smooth transition from ALP to formal schools.

- The contents of the curriculum also need to be appropriately communicated back to parents and communities, as there was significant confusion about what subjects ALPs teach.

Teachers, Administrators, and PTAs

- Teacher and principal training should discourage corporal punishment and focus on creating a positive class environment. ALP teachers were perceived by some respondents to be better trained and have more positive teaching behaviors, and the project should continue to train ALP teachers thoroughly.

- Teaching and learning strategies should address the needs of low performing students and provide guidance for how to support students struggling to learn, as there is evidence that some children leave school because the content feels too difficult for them. Some struggling students may also have learning disabilities, and this should be addressed in teacher training.

- PTAs should receive training in conflict resolution, as our findings suggest that resolving conflict between parents and teachers is already recognized as a key role of the PTA, and that such conflicts are common.

- The secondary data indicated a significant gender disparity in the general teacher corps. If ALP can create a more gender-representative teaching corps, it could possibly have an impact on children, especially girls, by providing positive role models.

- Teachers at the schools for CWD report that formal school teachers have little training or experience with CWD. If ALPs will be serving this population, it is likely that teachers will need significant training and support on how to accommodate CWD in the classroom.

Advocacy

- Although many children were out of school, all respondents reported that they believe education is very important. This implies that advocacy strategies should focus communicating the fact that school is important, but rather provide strategies that will enable parents to send their children to school.

- Children's desires to attend or leave school appear to have a large impact on retention. Advocacy efforts should target children in addition to parents and community members, especially children not living with their parents who do not receive parental encouragement to attend. They should harness "positive peer pressure," communicating to children that going to school is a popular and worthwhile choice.

- Teachers at schools for children with disabilities suggest that very negative perceptions and stigmas persist around children with disabilities for parents and communities. This should be explicitly and aggressively addressed in the project's advocacy work.

Data

- Data gaps persist in the EMIS, and the lack of timely EMIS data presented a challenge for our data collection efforts. The project should work with MoE to closely capture vulnerable populations such as CWD and children living outside parental care, and ensure accurate and up to date enrollment and retention information, to determine what their unique needs are and how they can be addressed.

- Further work is needed to define what attributes constitute a "child with disabilities"; currently, EMIS only tracks students who are deaf and blind, excluding other children with physical and mental needs such as mobility impairments and learning disabilities. If improved data collection methods are not implemented, number of students with other disabilities will continue to be unreported, posing challenges to the ALPs that intend to serve them.

Next Steps

This RERA's secondary and primary data collection and analysis provides an initial landscape for how the Access to Quality Education for Liberian Children activity can approach critical tasks such as teacher training, site selection and rehabilitation, learner eligibility and transition between ALP and formal schools, materials development and community engagement. Sharing these findings with stakeholders and engaging them in consultations for planning will help ensure that the information is understood and properly applied.

Analysis of secondary data paints a challenging picture for children and families who are not enrolled in the formal school system, and highlights the pain points of Liberia's education system and society as a whole. Teachers, parents and children who participated in the FGDs and interviews provided more detail to the realities of overage learners or children with disabilities within society.

Next steps will include our project launch, where we will host a consultation with key stakeholders about Accelerated Quality Education's programming. In July 2017, the project will conduct a site mapping exercise, which will collect more localized as well as regional information about the suitability of individual sites to host ALPs. In the coming months, the project will also conduct a perception survey to ensure proper engagement and messaging. This RERA's recommendations provide key inputs to all of these upcoming activities.

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Annex: Demographics of KII and FGD Participants

Type and county	School and group	Level of Education					Age group							Total
		No Education	Elementary/ Jr. High	High School	Certificate	College/ University	14-15	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Unknown	
FGDs in Montserrado	Urban school	2	26	10	7	12	20	6	12	9	5	5		57
	Parents	2	6	8		4		5	9	3	2	1		20
	Male			6		4		3	4	2	1			10
	Female	2	6	2				2	5	3				10
	Teachers			2	7	8		1	3	6	3	4		17
	Male				2	5		1		2	2	2		7
	Female			2	5	3			3	4	1	2		10
	Children		20				20							20
	Male		10				10							10
	Female		10				10							10
	Rural school	8	24	13				2	10	15	7	3	1	58
	Parents	8	4	8				1	6	8	1	3	1	20
	Male	2		8				1		6	1	2		10
	Female	6	4						6	2		1	1	10
	Teachers			5	7	6		1	4	7	6			18
	Male				4	4			2	3	3			8
	Female			5	3	2		1	2	4	3			10
	Children		20	0	0	0	20							20
	Male		10				10							10
	Female		10				10							10
FGDs in Grand Bassa	Urban school	5	23	15	5	1	20	2	7	8	6	6		49
	Parents	5	3	8				2	5	5	2	2		16
	Male	1		5						3	1	2		6
	Female	4	3	3				2	5	2	1			10
	Teachers			7	5	1			2	3	4	4		13
	Male			2	4	1			1	2	2	2		7
	Female			5	1				1	1	2	2		6
	Children		20				20							20
	Male		10				10							10
	Female		10				10							10

Type and county	School and group	Level of Education					Age group							Total
		No Education	Elementary/ Jr. High	High School	Certificate	College/ University	14-15	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Unknown	
	Rural school	**3**	**18**	**8**	**4**	**3**	**13**	**1**	**6**	**6**	**6**	**4**		**36**
	Parents	2	6	5		2		1	5	3	4	2		15
	Male		2	5					1	1	3	2		7
	Female	2	4			2		1	4	2	1			8
	Teachers			3	4	1			1	3	2	2		8
	Male			3	3					3	1	2		6
	Female				1	1			1		1			2
	Children	1	12				13							13
	Male		7				7							7
	Female	1	5				6							6
Interviews in Montserrado	**School for blind children**			**1**	**2**	**1**				**2**	**2**			**4**
	Teachers			1	2	1				2	2			4
	Male			1		1				1	1			2
	Female				2					1	1			2
	School for deaf children			**1**	**2**	**1**		**1**		**1**	**2**			**4**
	Teachers			1	2	1		1		1	2			4
	Male			1		1		1			1			2
	Female				2					1	1			2

Annex: FGD Protocol for Teachers

1. **(RERA) Access and retention in education programs:**
    a. **(RERA)** In this/your community, are there many children ages 8-15 who are not in school?
        i. **(RERA)** What are some of the reasons why children might never start school?
            (RERA) What are some of the reasons why children might start school, and then leave?
    b. **(RERA)** Who makes the decision to send the children to school?
        i. **(RERA)** What factors do you think they consider in making the decision to enroll the children in school or an ALP program?
        ii. **(RERA)** What/Who else might influence the decision to send children to school?
        iii. **(RERA)** What encourages children to continue in school or in an ALP program?
    c. **(Gender)** Do you think in the community, they believe that educating children equally important for boys and girls? Why? Why not?
        i. **(Gender)** What factors are specific for educating boys and what factors are specific for educating girls?
    d. **(RERA)** When do you think it is the right age to sign up a child for grade 1?
        i. **(RERA)** At what age do you think it is too late for a child to go into grade 1?
        ii. **(RERA)** Do you think it is a problem if there are children of different ages in grade 1? Why?
2. **(RERA) Relationship between ALP and 'regular' schools:**
    a. **(RERA)** Do you know or have you heard about ALP Schools?
        i. Can you describe the difference between, ALP school, and a regular school?
        ii. Is there an ALP center in your community or near the school?
    b. **(RERA) If you have to choose, w**hich program do you prefer to send your children to, the ALP or to regular school? Why?
        i. **(RERA)**How do you feel about the teaching quality and learning process of ALP centers compared to regular schools?
        ii. **(RERA)**Do you have any concern about safety in ALP schools as compared to regular school?
        iii. **(Gender) If any, w**hat are your safety concerns for boys compared to girls attending ALP Schools?
    c. **(RERA)** What problems, if any, exist between parents, teachers, and students in regular vs. ALP schools?
        i. If so, what did you do or what can you do to solve the problem?
    d. **(RERA)** Do you see any challenges to move from an ALP to a regular school?
        i. **(Gender) If yes,** are there different challenges for girls than boys to move from an ALP to a regular school? If so, what are they? Why?
        ii. **(RERA)** When or **at what level** do you think children in ALP centers should be allowed to join the regular school? Why?
        iii. **(RERA)** (If they say, after they finish) Is there any other time that they should be allowed to join?

Dear participants, we are going to discuss School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV). If you do not feel comfortable to participate, you can choose not to participate. One of the risks here is that you may feel uncomfortable discussing this or may upset you if you have experiences related to SRGBV. But if you are willing to participate, then we will talk about when students feel safe and when they are involved in man/woman business.

You MUST NOT under any circumstances use people's names or share any information about other people that might be identifiable. We kindly let you know that if you start sharing in the group personal information we will stop you and ask you to tell us general information only. Remember, we have agreed not to tell other people any details about what we are talking and we will not use anyone's name.

3. **(Gender) GBV:** *How common do students, teachers, and community members think gender-based violence is (define) in school and at home? [Framing Question]*
    a. What does violence generally mean to you? Are boys and girls victims of the same kind of violence? How frequently do you think violence takes place in the community? Who do you think is the source of the violence? How do you and others respond to the violence?
    b. To what extent do you hear about the existence of violence against boys or violence against girls in schools (**in your school or other schools**)?
    c. Do you think that students are always safe when they are at school?
        i. If not, what are the reasons why students sometimes do not feel safe at school?
        ii. What or who causes students sometimes to not be safe at school? Where does it happen? Are there any factors that makes girls more vulnerable compared to boys?
    d. What are the main responses when violence occurs between a child and a teacher, other adults or older children in school? [Prompt: Community response, Parent response, School response]
        i. Are the responses different for boys compared to girls?
        ii. In these cases, how does it affect the student **after** the violence?
        iii. What happens to the perpetrator/person causing the violence?
    e. What are the main factors that enable people to respond or prevent violent incidents in schools?
        i. Do survivors/children who survived violence look for help or report the incident when they experience violence? If so, why or why not? Is this different for boys and girls?
        ii. What would make people more comfortable to report these incidents especially when they occur in school?
    f. At what age do children learn about man/woman business (Sex)?
        i. At what age do children start engaging in these activities? Is it different for boys and girls?
        ii. Is it always the free choice of the student to do man/woman business, or are there times when students might be convinced, or forced to engage in these activities? Are there differences for boys and girls?
        iii. When and where does this usually happen? [School, Home, Community]
    g. What do you think the community or the school could do to make schools safer and prevent violence? What about Parents, teacher or students? [Prompt]
        i. Are you aware of existence of support networks or services that address cases of violence in the school or in the community? If yes, are these services mostly responsive (after the incident) or are they preventative?
        ii. Are there other things that could be done to stop students being convinced or forced to do man/woman business?

Annex: FGD Protocol for Parents

1. **(RERA) Access and retention in education programs:**
    a. **(RERA)** In your community, are there many children ages 8-15 who are not in school?
        i. **(RERA)** What are some of the reasons why children might never start school?
        (RERA) What are some of the reasons why children might start school, and then leave?
    b. *(RERA)* Who makes the decision to send the children to school?
        i. *(RERA)* What factors do you consider in making the decision to enroll the children in school or an ALP program?
        ii. **(RERA)** What/Who else might influence the decision to send children to school?
        iii. *(RERA)* What encourages children to continue in school or in an ALP program?
    c. **(Gender)** In your community, is educating children equally important for boys and girls? Why? Why not?
        i. **(Gender)** What factors are specific for educating boys and what factors are specific for educating girls?
    d. **(RERA)** When do you think it is the right age to sign up a child for grade 1?
        i. **(RERA)** At what age do you think it is too late for a child to go into grade 1?
        ii. **(RERA)** Do you think it is a problem if there are children of different ages in grade 1?

2. **(RERA) Relationship between ALP and 'regular' schools:** *What are the potential problems and possible solutions in communities where there is access to both 'regular' and 'ALP' schools? [FRAMING QUESTION --- NOT to be read aloud by data collectors]*
    a. **(RERA)** Do you know or have you heard about ALP Schools?
        i. Can you describe the difference between, ALP school, and a regular school?
        ii. Is there an ALP center in your community?
    b. **(RERA)** Which program do you prefer to send your children to, the ALP or to regular school? Why?
        i. **(RERA)** How do you feel about the teaching quality and learning process of ALP centers compared to regular schools?
        ii. **(RERA)** Do you have any concern about safety in ALP schools as compared to regular school?
        iii. **(Gender)** What are your safety concerns for boys compared to girls attending ALP Schools?
    c. **(RERA)** What problems, if any, exist between parents, teachers, and students in regular vs. ALP schools?
        i. If so, what did you do or what can you do to solve the problem?
    d. **(RERA)** Do you see any challenges to move from an ALP to a regular school?
        i. **(Gender)** Are there different challenges for girls than boys to move from an ALP to a regular school? If so, what are they? Why?
        ii. **(RERA)** When do you think children in ALP centers should be allowed to join the regular school? Why?
        iii. **(RERA)** (If they say, after they finish) Is there any other time that they should be allowed to join?

Dear participants, we are going to discuss School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV). If you do not feel comfortable to participate, you can choose not to participate. One of the risks here is that you may feel uncomfortable discussing this or may upset you if you have experiences related to SRGBV. But

if you are willing to participate, then we will talk about when students feel safe and when they are involved in man/woman business.

You MUST NOT under any circumstances use people's names or share any information about other people that might be identifiable. We kindly let you know that if you start sharing in the group personal information we will stop you and ask you to tell us general information only. Remember, we have agreed not to tell other people any details about what we are talking and we will not use anyone's name.

3. **(Gender) GBV**: *How common do students, teachers, and community members think gender-based violence is (define) in school and at home? [FRAMING QUESTION –- NOT to be read aloud by data collectors]*

    a. What does violence generally mean to you? Are boys and girls victims of the same kind of violence?
    b. How frequently do you think violence takes place in your community?
    c. Who is the source of the violence? How do you and others respond to the violence?
    d. To what extent do you hear about the existence of violence against boys or violence against girls **in schools**?
    e. Do you think that students are always safe when they are at school?
        i. If not, what are the reasons why students sometimes do not feel safe at school?
        ii. What or who causes students sometimes to not be safe at school? Where does it happen? Are there any factors that makes girls more vulnerable compared to boys?
    f. What are the main responses when violence occurs between a child and a teacher, other adults or older children in school? [Prompt: Community response, Parent response, School response]
        i. Are the responses different for boys compared to girls?
        ii. In these cases, how does it affect the student?
        iii. What happens to the perpetrator/person causing the violence?
    g. What are the main factors that enable people to respond or prevent violent incidents in schools?
        i. Do survivors/children who survived violence look for help or report the incident when they experience violence? If so, why or why not? Is this different for boys and girls?
        ii. What would make people more comfortable to report these incidents especially when they occur in school?
    h. At what age do children learn about man/woman business (Sex)?
        i. At what age do children start engaging in these activities? Is it different for boys and girls?
        ii. Is it always the free choice of the student to do man/woman business, or are there times when students might be convinced, or forced to engage in these activities? Are there differences for boys and girls?
        iii. When and where does this usually happen? [School, Home, Community]
    i. What do you think the community or the school could do to make schools safer and prevent violence? What about Parents, teacher or students? [Prompt]
        i. Are you aware of existence of support networks or services that address cases of violence in your community? If yes, are these services mostly responsive (after the incident) or are they preventative?
        ii. Are there other things that could be done to stop students being convinced or forced to do man/woman business?

Annex: FGD Protocol for Children

1. **(RERA) Access and retention in education programs:**
   a. **(RERA)** In your community, are there many children ages 8-15 who are not in school?
      i. **(RERA)** What are some of the reasons why children might never start school?
      (RERA) What are some of the reasons why children might start school, and then leave?
   b. **(RERA)** Who decided you could come to school?
      i. **(RERA)** What factors do you consider in making the decision to enroll the children in school or an ALP program?
      ii. **(RERA)** What/Who else might influence the decision to send children to school?
      iii. **(RERA)** *What/who encourages you to attend school?*
   c. **(Gender)** Do you think education is equally important for boys and girls? Why not?
      i. **(Gender)** What factors are specific for educating boys and what factors are specific for educating girls?
   d. **(RERA)** When do you think it is the right age to sign up a child for grade 1?
      i. **(RERA)** At what age do you think it is too late for a child to go into grade 1?
      ii. **(RERA)** What do you think about having children of different ages in the same classroom with you?
2. **(RERA) Relationship between ALP and 'regular' schools:** *What are the potential problems and possible solutions in communities where there is access to both 'regular' and 'ALP' schools? [FRAMING QUESTION — NOT to be read aloud by data collectors]*
   a. **(RERA)** Do you know or have you heard about ALP Schools?
      i. Can you describe the difference between, ALP school, and a regular school?
      ii. Is there an ALP center in your community?
   b. **(RERA)** Do you attend an ALP or to regular school? *[Note to data collectors, if the child attends ALP, please ask the following 3 questions for ALP schools; If the child attends regular school, please ask the following questions for regular schools]*
      iii. **(RERA)** How do you feel about the teaching quality and learning process of ALP centers/regular schools?
      iv. **(RERA)** Do you have any concern about safety in ALP schools/regular schools?
      v. **(Gender)** *How safe do you feel in an ALP school/regular school??*
   c. If you have attended both ALP and regular school, what are some of the differences you see in the two kinds of schools?
   d. **(RERA)** What problems, if any, exist between parents, teachers, and students in regular or ALP schools?
      vi. If so, what did you do or what can you do to solve the problem?
   e. **(RERA)** What are the challenges that may prevent you to move from an ALP to a regular school?
      vii. **(Gender)** Are there different challenges for girls than boys to move from an ALP to a regular school? If so, what are they? Why?
      viii. **(RERA)** When do you think children in ALP centers should be allowed to join the regular school? Why?
      ix. **(RERA)** (If they say, after they finish) Is there any other time that they should be allowed to join?

Annex: KII Protocol for Teachers at Education Institutions for Children with Disabilities

Sex of Interviewee: ☐Male   ☐Female

Name of School/Institution:

_____

A. GENERAL INFORMATION   _Directions for the interviewer:_ Read the questions and choices to the interviewee and put a ✔(check) in the box next to his/her response. You may ask follow-up with clarificatory questions or elaborate should the interviewee ask for further explanation.
Name of the Institution_____
Location institution County: ☐ Montserrado ☐ Grand Bassa   Site :☐ Urban   ☐ Rural
The Institution has grades _____to _____
How long have you been working in this institution?   _____ years   _____ months

What is your position? ☐ Teacher ☐ Administrator☐ Other_____
 	
    a. Is the interviewee is also disabled? ☐Yes ☐ No (Note to be observed by the Interviewer)
 	
 If yes, what type of disability?_____
 	
    b. If the interview is with an administrator, are there staff members with disability? ☐Yes ☐ No
 	
 If yes, what type of disability?_____

What is the highest academic degree you have received?   ☐High school graduate   ☐B- Certificate   ☐C- Certificate   ☐Bachelor's Degree (Specify program _____)   ☐Master's Degree (Specify program _____)   ☐Other (specify) :_____

Do you have a professional teaching license?	☐Yes☐ No

Have you attended any training on how to identify and teach children with special needs/disabilities?

☐No ☐Yes

    a. How many children are enrolled in the school?

                         Number_____   ☐Don't know

Grade	Number of Children		
	Male	Female	Total
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
Total			

    b. Roughly what percentages of the children in the school are overage? (for the Principal)
         _____

    c. Roughly what percentages of the children in your class are overage?(for the Teacher)

Do your students have the following types of disabilities? (How do you define persons with disabilities?)

☐Visual ☐Audio   ☐Behavioral ☐Physical   ☐Mental/Intellectual   ☐Brain injury

☐Multiple disabilities☐ Learning Disability☐ Others (specify): _____

How far do your students come from (from the community, from the county, from other places)?
_____

Is there a case where students were turned away because there was no space in the school?

☐ Yes☐ No

Are there cases where students from the school/institution transferred to a regular school?

☐ Yes☐ No

Have you ever had any gender awareness training (i.e., how to promote classroom equity, how to reduce and address gender-based violence, etc.)? ☐No ☐Yes

If YES, please specify the name(s) of the training(s):

*(a)*_____

*(b)*_____

Directions for the interviewer: Read the questions to the interviewee. Elaborate, paraphrase or translate if necessary. Audio record and write down responses. You may probe deeper by asking follow-up questions or ask the interviewee for further elaboration.

[RERA] Disabilities: What are the reasons why children with disabilities often don't go to school (formal or ALP)? What are some of the ways in which these problems would be addressed? (Please indicate whether it is about ALP or formal school).

[GENDER]What do you think about children with disabilities? Do you believe that educating children with disability is important? Is it equally important for boys and girls with disabilities? Why? Why not?

[RERA] What are the traditional or tribal beliefs that you are aware of around people with disabilities?

[RERA] What do you think are important for families, communities, government and schools to provide in order for children with disabilities to go to school?

[GENDER]Are children with disabilities more prone to being victims of violence (Gender Based Violence)?

a. If yes, is it different for boys and girls? What are the factors/root causes that creates this difference in vulnerability to violence for boys? What are the factors/root causes that creates this difference in vulnerability to violence for girls?

b. Are there any victims of violence support network or support particularly for persons with disabilities?

If there was no school for the blind/deaf, do you think the regular schools can help the children with disabilities? If yes, how?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME!